DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 801 SP 037 965

AUTHOR Goldstein, Lisa
TITLE Taking Caring Seriously: The Ethic of Care in Classroom Life.
PUB DATE 1998-04-17
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Elementary School Teachers; Primary Education; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Caring

ABSTRACT

This paper uses an excerpt from a case study of a primary classroom teacher, depicting some of the ways that the ethic of care contributed to the education of young children. The excerpt applies Noddings' conception of caring (an encounter between a one-caring and a cared-for characterized by engrossment and motivational displacement on the part of the one-caring and reciprocity on the part of the cared-for) to an analysis of the teacher's morning meeting with students. The morning meeting involves a story or song, then introduction to the day's learning center activities. The teacher provides a range of tasks suited to various ability levels. She is flexible and responsive to each child as an individual. She gives primacy to the children's own desires and goals for themselves, and she invests in the children emotionally. She believes that her teaching involves four intertwined strands: students, herself, the environment, and her philosophy. Care-centered teaching offers a powerful alternative to conceptions of caring shaping current thinking about the term. The ethic of care is a construct that allows early childhood teachers to position caring in a way that offers an opportunity to enhance and deepen understanding of the work teachers do. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 419 801

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Goldstein

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Lisa Goldstein
University of Texas at Austin
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
244 Sanchez Building
Austin, TX 78712
(512) 471-4089
goldstein@mail.utexas.edu

Taking caring seriously: The ethic of care in classroom life

Paper presented at the 1998 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA

Caring has become a buzzword in education: a staggering number of recent books and articles have been published to extol the virtues of caring classrooms, caring teaching, and caring in the curriculum (Alter 1995, Arnstine 1990, Bredekamp and Copple 1997, Charney 1991, Curcio and First 1995, Damarin 1994, Lamme and McKinley 1992, Lipsitz 1996, Prillaman, Eaker, and Kendrick 1994, Rasinski 1990, Robicheaux 1996, Rogers and Webb 1991, Rosiek 1994, Rust 1994, Sickle and Spector 1996). Caring is mentioned so frequently and with such regularity that the term itself is beginning to lose its specificity and its power, becoming more of a platitude than a meaningful professional stance. This paper intends to rectify this situation. In this paper I discuss in some depth the notion of the ethic of care, emphasizing the perspectives developed by Nel Noddings (1984), and link the ethic of care directly to classroom teaching by providing specific examples of care-centered educational practices drawn from a recent study undertaken in a primary grade classroom (Goldstein 1997).

SP037965

Though there have been attempts in the recent rash of literature on caring to root care in a theoretical framework, most of these attempts have been fairly superficial, generally taking the shape of cursory, parenthetical references to Noddings (1984) or Gilligan (1982), with the theories developed by these scholars rarely explored in depth. Instead, most of these recent works seem rooted in the assumption that everyone knows and agrees upon what is meant by the term caring: one author writes "when we think of caring, we usually think of gentle smiles and warm hugs" (Rogers 1994, 33). The generic, operational definition of caring in classrooms includes images of a teacher being nurturing, supportive, nice, inclusive, responsive, and kind. Caring is conceived of as a feeling, or a set of feelings, that cause a teacher to behave in a certain way.

While we surely want classrooms that are characterized by warmth, nurturance, inclusion, and support for children, linking these traits to the term caring poses significant problems. The commonly held definitions and understandings of caring—the gentle smiles and warm hugs—position caring only in the affective domain: it is a feeling, a personality trait, a temperament that makes one suitable to work with children. This simplistic understanding of caring puts constraints on the classroom curriculum, limits our conception of what it means to be a teacher, and obscures the complexity and the intellectual challenge of teachers' work.

If we do not begin to think about caring in new ways, ways that focus on its well-developed theoretical foundations, then the recent trend toward emphasizing caring will be detrimental to teachers and to students. We must take strides toward developing and communicating an understanding of caring that emphasizes its deeply ethical, philosophical and experiential roots. Feminist moral theory, specifically the ethic of care, can provide such an

understanding of caring. My intent is to use the narratives of classroom life in this paper to highlight the ways that the ethic of care can be used to deepen and enhance our understanding of what it means to be a caring teacher.

The ethic of care

Though many feminist philosophers have explored the nature of care and concern, Nel Noddings' work *Caring* (1984) has been the most influential in the field of education. When Noddings uses the term caring, she is describing not an attribute or personality trait, but a relation. Caring is not something you are, but rather something you engage in, something you do. Every interaction provides one with an opportunity to enter into a caring relation, although, certainly, individuals always retain the option of interacting in either a caring or an uncaring way. Noddings identifies the deep moral dimension of the ethic of care when she asserts: "My first and unending obligation is to meet the other as one-caring" (1984, 17).

As Noddings describes it, each caring encounter is an interaction between a person giving care and a person receiving that care: a one-caring and a cared-for[1]. In a caring encounter, the one-caring meets the cared-for with engrossment. The one-caring opens herself to the cared-for with full attention, and with receptivity to his perspective and situation. Noddings' understanding of what it means to care is rooted in an extremely specific definition of receptivity, one which departs in important ways from the usual usage: for Noddings, receptivity is not synonymous with empathy. To the contrary, in Noddings' depiction of a caring encounter, the one-caring does not empathize with the cared-for, trying to imagine how she would feel were

[1]For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to the one-caring as "she," and the cared-for as "he" throughout this paper. Certainly, individuals of either gender can, and should, fill either role. I shall continue this semantic distinction when referring to teachers and students as well: the teacher will be "she," the student "he."

she in his situation. The one-caring does not project, analyze, or generalize. Instead, as Noddings writes: "I receive the other into myself and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality" (1984, 30). The one-caring must engage in "feeling with" the other, attempting, to the greatest degree possible, to feel what he feels.

The one-caring's stance is also characterized by motivational displacement, defined by Noddings as the willingness to give primacy, even momentarily, to the goals and needs of the cared-for. Motivational displacement is a direct outcome of receptivity: when the one-caring is feeling with the cared-for, fully receiving him, his motives become her motives. As Noddings puts it, motivational displacement "involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's" (1984, 24). It is not enough simply to respond to the cared-for; the response must be shaped by the process of motivational displacement.

In determining the appropriate caring response, the one-caring does not give the cared-for what she would want were she in his situation, but attempts to feel what the cared-for feels in order to discern what he himself would want. The one-caring takes into consideration the other's wants, desires, and goals, which she has apprehended as a result of her receptivity, and reflects upon both his objective needs and what he expects of her. The appropriate caring response, then, is contextually specific, rooted in the particularities of a specific pair of individuals in a concrete situation: "the actions of one-caring will be varied rather than rule-bound; that is, her actions, while predictable in a global sense, will be unpredictable in detail" (Noddings 1984, 24).

The combination of engrossment and motivational displacement can happen on many different levels, from the intense—a mother caring for an

infant—to the fleeting—a stranger on campus stopping a busy professor to ask for directions. Though it is easy to envision the mother-infant relation as caring, the second scenario is equally well explained as a caring encounter using Noddings' definitions and terminology. The busy professor pauses, listening carefully to the request of the stranger (Noddings' engrossment). She has temporarily ceased her own musings and given primacy to the pressing needs of the stranger (Noddings' motivational displacement). It is the engrossment and motivational displacement that are the hallmarks of caring, not the depth of feeling. As Noddings explains, "I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every [cared-for]. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the [cared-for] . . . as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total" (1984, 180).

The caring encounter is completed once the cared-for has acknowledged the care he has received. Reciprocity can take different forms—smiles and gurgles from a baby, a thank you from the lost stranger—but it must occur in every caring encounter. This reciprocity is the sole responsibility of the cared-for in a caring relation, however it is a very powerful role. The one-caring is dependent on the cared-for—whatever the one-caring does is validated and made meaningful, or diminished and made meaningless, by the response of the cared-for (Noddings 1984, 60-1). The responsiveness of the cared-for can take many different forms, depending on the individuals, the nature of their relationship, and the dimensions of their interaction. Regardless of the form it takes, the cared-for's response is the one-caring's reward, and is the impetus for her continued caring. Noddings (1984, 52) reflects on this dimension of her own experience as one-caring:

> I am aided in meeting the burdens of caring by the reciprocal efforts of the cared-for. When my infant wriggles with delight as I bathe or feed him, I am aware of no burden but only a special delight of my own. Similarly, when I spend time in dialogue with my students, I am rewarded not only with appreciation, but also with all sorts of information and insights. I could as easily, and properly, say "I am receiving" as "I am giving." Thus, many of the "demands" of caring are not felt as demands. They are, rather, the occasions that offer most of what makes life worth living.

Caring encounters are also learning experiences for the cared-for. It is by being the cared-for that he or she will learn how to be one-caring. This perspective has significant implications for schooling. Teachers who meet their students as ones-caring, and who look upon the act of teaching as an opportunity to participate in caring encounters, will be teaching their students more than academic knowledge. These children will have the opportunity to learn how to care. This moves beyond the mere modeling of desired behaviors. It is a moral stance that has the potential to transform education.

That caring, as Noddings describes it, arises out of lived experience with caring relationships suggests that many educators are already likely to be active practitioners of the ethic of care. Our experiences in classrooms with children have shaped and informed our thinking about teaching and learning. The ethic of care provides a way of thinking about caring that repositions the concept, transforming it from a personality trait to a deliberate and decisive act. Noddings surely did not invent caring, but her work names and describes the relational world of teaching. Thinking about our caring for our students using Noddings' work as a starting point enables educators to understand more fully the intellectual aspects of caring, and allows us to think of caring as a sound foundation for curricular decision making.

Caring in classroom settings

Several scholars (Martin 1992; Noddings 1992) have attempted to move from the global features of feminist thinking to the specific realities of classroom life. However none provide any data, any concrete stories of life in care-centered classrooms. We are left wondering what it really means to teach children in a manner inspired by the ethic of care. What is a care-centered classroom like? How is the day organized? How does caring enter into curricular decision making? How does a commitment to caring impact a teacher's practices?

In a recent study (Goldstein 1997), I entered into a teaching and research relationship with a primary grade teacher, Martha George[2], to attempt to answer these questions. I was a daily participant-observer in Martha's sunny, suburban, Northern California classroom for a period of three months in the autumn of 1994, spending over 150 hours with Martha and her students. This paper contains an excerpt from the case study of Martha's classroom that arose from this investigation. This study of Martha's teaching is simply one portrait that depicts, in a specific, concrete, and vivid manner, some of the ways that the ethic of care can contribute to the education of young children.

My purpose is not to determine whether or not Martha George, the teacher with whom I worked on this study, is a caring teacher. Nor am I attempting to prove that Noddings' definition of caring is correct and accurate. Rather, I use Martha's teaching to provide concrete examples of the ways that the ethic of care can be used to understand the nature of the teaching decisions, interactions, and classroom curriculum common to many educational environments.

---

[2]Martha George is a pseudonym, as is the name of her school and all the names of the children mentioned in this article.

In this excerpt I apply Noddings' conception of caring—an encounter between a one-caring and a cared-for characterized by engrossment and motivational displacement on the part of the one-caring and reciprocity on the part of the cared-for—to the analysis of one small facet of Martha's classroom practice: morning meeting. Noddings asserts that "caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors" (1992, 17). However, she does point to engrossment and motivational displacement as behavioral indicators of caring, and also provides the following guidelines to assist observers in identifying caring encounters (1984, 24-5):

> The observer. . . cannot see the crucial motive and may misread the attitudinal signs. The observer, then, must judge caring, in part, by the following: First, the action . . . either brings about a favorable outcome for the cared-for or seems reasonably likely to do so; second, the one-caring displays a characteristic variability in her actions—she acts in a nonrule-bound fashion in behalf of the cared-for.

Drawing on these guidelines in my observations and analyses of Martha's caring teaching practices, I looked for evidence of engrossment and receptivity, motivational displacement, variability in response to the needs of individual students, and indications that her actions were intended to lead to a favorable outcome for her students.

Out of a desire to attend "to the manner as well as to the matter" (Peters 1959, 889) of this study, I strove to align my conceptual concerns and my methodological approach. I looked at this study as an opportunity to enter into caring relationships with others (Noddings 1984), and continually asked myself if the choice that I was making was one which would allow me to give care to the people with whom I would be working. I attempted to

operationalize the ethic of care in making each of the decisions I faced in developing my research design.

To do so, I developed a methodology drawing on narrative (Connelly and Clandinin 1987, 1990) and on other feminist research methodologies (Reinharz 1992). As a narrative, this study is characterized by close, detailed attention to the routines and regularities of everyday life in Martha's classroom (Connelly and Clandinin 1990). Narrative accounts of teaching aim to provide an interpretive reconstruction of a person's teaching practice (Connelly and Clandinin 1987). Like stories, narratives emphasize plot, meaning, and explanation, but their purpose is specific to the demands of educational research and practice: narratives intend "to develop a language of classrooms tied to the emotional, moral, and aesthetic character of classroom life" (Connelly and Clandinin 1987, 138).

Martha George had been teaching for ten years when this study took place. She is an experienced early childhood and elementary educator with a B.A. degree in child development and an M.A. in curriculum and teacher education. In the fall of 1994, while this study was under way, Martha was teaching an ungraded primary class: Martha's class was composed of twenty-four children who would be labeled kindergartners (five boys and four girls in this case), first graders (three boys and four girls) or second graders (three boys, five girls) in a more conventional setting. The children are predominantly upper middle class, and the class comprises mainly white or Asian American students, with a small handful of African Americans and Latinos. Seven of Martha's students speak English as a second language with varying degrees of fluency, and four are receiving special educational support for a variety of learning, communication, and behavioral difficulties. Martha makes no

attempt to teach separate curricula to the children from each grade. All of the academic activities are made available to all students, and performance expectations are fluid, based generally on ability, not chronological age. Martha had been at Bayview teaching her ungraded primary class for a month when I joined her in her classroom.

Morning meeting

Martha begins each day the same way, with a class meeting. She opens with a story or a song, then introduces the day's learning center activities to the children. Today, students will make solar system puzzles, create samples of Mars soil with sand, steel wool, and water, write in their journals about the Mars lander spacecrafts they built during center time yesterday. Martha describes the last activity: "At the zigzag table . . . moon reports. Olders need to look in the books on the table and find three facts about the moon that you would like to include in your report. Youngers may pick up one of the sheets that I made and trace the words." She reads off the names, but does not specify who is an older and who is a younger. Second graders are olders, kindergartners are youngers, for certain. But where do the first graders fit? I asked Martha about this, and she replied:

> It depends. It is not cut and dried at all and it varies from situation to situation. I usually leave it up to the kids to decide (trails off). Well, that's not entirely true either. I expect the second graders to do the more demanding option, and they know that. And I assume that most of the kinders will choose the simpler option. Though sometimes they surprise me, like Brian or Robert will choose to do the olders' page. And that's fine. The first graders tend to (pause) well, some of the first graders, like Lauren or Eleanor, are very capable academically, and they'll always opt to do the harder page. And some of the first graders who are just getting started with their writing skills, like Li Ping, for example, will take the easier page, and that's

> okay. And there are some first graders who are capable but who don't want to put forth much effort... they do the easier page too. And though that is not what I'd want for them academically, it tells me something about where they are at in other areas of their development. Sometimes I'll push those kids, and sometimes I won't. It depends.

Martha's personal understanding of caring teaching is prominently featured in this passage. The parallels to Noddings' characteristics of a caring encounter—engrossment, motivational displacement, variability in expectations and responses, actions intended to lead to a favorable outcome for the cared-fors—are also easily visible. Martha provides a range of tasks suited to a variety of ability levels. She is flexible and responsive to each child as an individual, and structures the activities in ways that allow the children to work at their appropriate level. She uses the anecdotal evidence generated by her observations of the children in this situation as a form of assessment. She gives primacy to the children's own desires and goals for themselves. Further, she considers the choices that the children make in this situation to be significant and revealing: they are sources of information with implications for understanding the children's academic and personal development. Her statement "it depends," repeated twice in this passage, captures the fluidity of her decision making and reveals the importance of contextual factors in her practice.

As Noddings' work on caring would suggest, Martha's approach to teaching is fundamentally rooted in a commitment to each child as an individual. Martha wrote in our dialogue journal: "It is very important to me that I respond to each child as an individual, which means really knowing them, which means investing in them emotionally." Responding to children as individuals is one of the fundamental tenets of progressive

education (Dewey 1938) and of high quality early childhood education (Bredekamp 1987). However, Martha takes this one step further. She is not content to stop at "really knowing them" in order to respond to their individual needs, but she also requires "investing in them emotionally" in order to do this type of work. This emotional investment, perhaps one of the deepest forms of engrossment, is one significant way that caring manifests itself and plays a role in Martha's life as a teacher. She not only thinks carefully about each child, but also cares deeply about each child, and about each child's experience in the classroom.

Meeting concludes with routine housekeeping tasks. "Okay! Lunch choices," Martha says. "The choices for today are baked chicken, wild pizza, sub sandwich, nachos, or hamburger." Martha stops what she is doing and turns to look at a wiggling, giggling boy with shiny black hair. "Andy..., " she says quietly. Andy busily pokes at the boy sitting beside him, unaware that he is the focus of the teacher's attention. Martha tries again, a bit louder this time. "Andy." He looks up at her sheepishly and puts his hands in his lap. "Andy, you're going to want to listen carefully to this so that you can make a good decision about lunch." Martha does not scold or reprimand. Andy simply needs to listen so that he can make a good choice.

As Martha records the lunch choices on the attendance clipboard, she asks Mitchell to move away from Mark. She issues her request in a whisper, as if misbehavers do not deserve her full voice. Mitchell does not move, and continues to disturb Mark and some of the other children around him. Martha looks up, pencil poised in midair. She gives Mitchell a stern look, and says firmly, "Mitchell, if you want to choose a new spot for yourself, you will have to do it now. If you don't, I'll choose for you." Mitchell wants to choose for himself; he wants to make a good decision. He stands, moves

away from Mark, and finds a new spot, turning around like a puppy several times before sitting down.

In Noddings' conception of caring, emphasis is given to motivational displacement: the one-caring must give primacy to the needs and goals of the cared-for. Weight is also given to the idea that a caring encounter is characterized by indications that a one-caring's actions were intended to lead to a favorable outcome for her students. Martha's interactions with two of her misbehaving students during this morning's meeting highlight the tension between these two facets of caring. Noddings, too, acknowledges this complexity. She points out "we cannot always act in ways which bring immediate reactions of pleasure from our children" (1984, 24).

Though Martha conceives of routine forms of classroom management as opportunities to engage in caring encounters, there are times when she is not willing to give primacy to the students' desires and goals. In this particular case, she does not allow Andy or Mitchell to disturb their classmates during meeting. In fact, she goes so far as to insist that Mitchell relinquish his chosen spot on the carpet in order to ensure that the disruptions cease. Martha makes these specific pedagogical and managerial choices because she believes that the academic and social content of the class's morning meeting is more important and more valuable to Andy and Mitchell than their desire to wiggle, giggle, and fidget. In this particular caring encounter, Martha's level of motivational displacement is low, however, her decisions were clearly driven by her desire for her students to learn and to grow. Caring encounters, then, are variable in their composition and contours.

In a statement that accurately describes Martha's morning meeting, Noddings states: "Conflict may arise between . . . what the cared-for wants

and what we see as his best interest" (1984, 55). This issue is of particular relevance in early childhood settings. Because of the young age and concomitant levels of foresight and judgment of our students, early childhood teachers are regularly confronted by the reality that a child's immediate personal goals might be inappropriate (chatting during meeting), unacceptable (swearing at a classmate), or unsafe (running with scissors). Teachers surely have an obligation to foster the growth of their students (Dewey 1938; Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1989), but the precise balance between teacher choice and child choice is unclear. A teacher's response must be situated, and contextually specific.

In asserting the central role of Dewey's belief that "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children" (1902/1990, 7) in her vision of caring education, Noddings gives the adult, the one-caring, a great deal of responsibility for determining the appropriate goals for the cared-fors. This does not allow the one-caring free reign, however. Noddings (1984, 23) points out:

> When we care, we should, ideally, be able to present reasons for our action/inaction which would persuade a reasonable, disinterested observer that we have acted in behalf of the cared-for. This does not mean that all such observers have to agree that they would have behaved exactly as we did in a particular caring situation . . . . [But] the reasons we give . . . should be so well connected to the objective elements of the problem that our course of action clearly either stands a chance of succeeding in behalf of the cared-for, or can have been engaged in only with the hope of effecting something for the cared-for.

Though Andy and Mitchell were very interested in their own agendas during this morning's meeting, Martha did not feel that their desire to squirm and chat were in their best interests, either educationally or socially.

Her course of action—asking Andy to be still, insisting that Mitchell find a new location on the carpet—arose from her plan to provide them with educative experiences. Martha arrived at a solution that worked well in the specific context of her classroom, her students, and her personal working understanding of caring teaching practices.

Teaching as a relation

In one of our long conversations about our teaching practices, Martha described her teaching as a braid of four intertwined strands: "The children, me, the environment, and my philosophy." It is not surprising that Martha started her list with the children. They are the center of the universe she has created in Room 4, and all that occurs in the classroom is in direct response to the children and their needs. Martha's relationships with the children are the most important part of her teaching experience. She said:

> I need that connection to them.... It is an interaction that goes back and forth.... They know how I feel about them, and they in turn can give that to me. And then, because they give it to me, I can give it back to them.... I think that it influences my level of excitement at being with them. It influences me in terms of I want to pick things that they'll love because I want them to love whatever is going on in my class. I think it makes me very thoughtful about things.

This statement touches upon Noddings' notion of reciprocity as the sole role of the cared-for in a caring encounter. Martha's students, her cared-fors, acknowledge the care they receive from their teacher, and do so in ways that deepen and enrich Martha's commitment to meeting them as one-caring. Martha's relationships with the children drive her practice, form the core of her approach to classroom management and organization, and shape her

curricular decision making. Teaching is more than a job for Martha. Teaching is a relation.

Despite the obvious emotional depth of Martha's teaching relationships, her practice is not demonstrably loving. Like Martha herself, her care-centered teaching is not effusive, lovey-dovey, or sickly sweet. Martha insists that the children in her care take responsibility for themselves and their own experience: she values and encourages independence, not dependence. She is not a over-bearing carer, clinging tightly to the children and smothering them with her attention. Martha says "I try to communicate [my caring feelings] in lots of subtle ways . . . . I'm not an emotionally flowery person, so I don't do lots of real big shows of affection."

Naturally, an approach to teaching that is so deeply personal is bound to be unique, and idiosyncratic: another teacher operationalizing the ethic of care in her work with children is likely to have a care-centered approach to teaching that departs from Martha's in certain aspects. While the essential and critical fundamentals of high quality education are certainly non-negotiable, cookie-cutter conformity to rule or principle is not in keeping with this perspective on teaching. Though engrossment, motivational displacement and reciprocity are to be expected in a caring teaching environment, the ways that they surface and play out is open to a wide range of possibilities.

The personal and idiosyncratic quality of care-centered practice leads to potentially troubling ambiguity. There are certain behaviors and ways of thinking about caring relations with youngsters that are clearly acceptable and others that are obviously pathological. But the borderlands, the precise boundaries between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, child-serving and adult-serving, are cloudy, shrouded in a silent haze of ambiguity.

For example, Alice Miller (1983, 3) warns us of "poisonous pedagogy," the phenomenon of doing harm to children, physically or psychologically, and thinking that you have done so "for their own good."

Further, as Robin Leavitt points out in her powerful and disturbing book *Power and Emotion in Infant-Toddler Day Care*, there are times when, due to its unequal nature and to children's understandably limited ability to contribute to it, the caring relationship may not be enough to sustain even the most committed teacher's capacities for ongoing caregiving. This can lead to a great deal of emotional strain, anger, and alienation for the teacher. When teachers become burdened in this way, their caring feelings are transformed into "emotional labor—the publicly observable management of feelings sold for a wage" (1994, 61). As we begin to integrate caring into education, we must not shy away from considering and discussing the more difficult aspects of this association.

Though caring has long been a part of teaching , it has been given little credence as a legitimate scholarly perspective. The roots of this disregard for caring can be found deep in the history of the field of education. Early in the twentieth century teachers of young children were eager to appear professional, to be experts (Bloch 1987). Caring and love were very nice, but they were not as impressive as scientific knowledge. By the end of World War I, the term "scientifically sound curriculum" was synonymous with "legitimate" education (Bloch 1987, 46). This emphasis on science and scientific approaches to education drove underground the softer and more humanistic aspects of education, and eclipsed the central importance of caring.

Contempt for caring and for the care-giving professions continues to be widespread in Western culture. In her book *Moral Boundaries*, philosopher

Joan Tronto (1993) discusses this phenomenon, positioning it as a political problem. She writes: "Since our society treats public accomplishment, rationality, and autonomy as worthy qualities, care is devalued insofar as it embodies their opposites. . . . privacy, emotion, and the needy" (p. 117). Professions rooted in care-giving—nursing, teaching, social work—are deemed less worthy, and have low status as a result. Tronto also asserts that the importance of caring and caring work has been degraded in order to maintain the power of those who are privileged. Because teachers do caring work, they can become objects of disdain.

But, of course, caring is not a non-intellectual activity (Jaggar 1989). In the words of Sara Freedman (1990, 245), "effective caregiving cannot be divorced from thought, nor productive thought from caregiving." Caring for children is both an emotional and an intellectual act, and as such forms a legitimate foundation on which to base an early childhood curriculum.

As this discussion of Martha George's ethic of care-centered teaching illustrates, the feminist interpretation of caring—an action rather than an attribute, a deliberate moral and intellectual stance rather than simply a feeling—offers a powerful alternative to the conceptions of caring currently shaping our thinking about the term. The ethic of care is a construct which will allow early childhood teachers to position caring in a way that offers us the opportunity to enhance and to deepen our understanding of the work we do, and which will provide a strong, powerful alternative to the commonly held sense of caring as little more than those gentle smiles and warm hugs.

References

Bloch, M.N. 1987. Becoming scientific and professional: an historical perspective on the aims and effects of early education. In Popkewitz, T.S. (ed.), *The formation of the school subjects*. New York: The Falmer Press.

Bredekamp, S., ed. 1987. *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bredekamp, S., and Copple, C. 1997. *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs. Revised edition*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Charney, R.S. 1991. *Teaching children to care*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Connelly, M.F. and Clandinin, D.J. 1987. On narrative method, biography and narrative unities in the study of teaching. *Journal of Educational Thought*. 21 (3): 130–9.

Connelly, M.F. and Clandinin, D.J. 1990. Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*. 19 (5): 2–14.

Dewey, J. 1938. *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books.

Freedman, S. 1990. Weeding women out of "woman's true profession." In Antler J. and Biklen, S.K. (eds.), *Changing education*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Goldstein, L.S. 1997. *Teaching with love: a feminist approach to early childhood education*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Jaggar, A.M. 1989. Love and knowledge: emotion in feminist epistemology. In Jaggar, A. M. and Bordo, S.R. (eds.), *Gender/body/knowledge: feminist reconstructions of being and knowing*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Katz, L.G. 1971. Sentimentality in preschool teachers: some possible interpretations. *Peabody Journal of Education*. 48 (2): 96–105.

Leavitt, R.L. 1994. *Power and emotion in infant-toddler day care*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Martin, J.R. 1992. *The schoolhome*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Miller, A. 1983. *For your own good*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Noddings, N. 1984. *Caring*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, N. 1992. *The challenge to care in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Peters, R.S. 1959. Must an educator have an aim? In Peters, R.S. (ed.), *Authority, responsibility, and education*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Reinharz, S. 1992. *Feminist methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rogers, D.L. 1994. Conceptions of caring in a fourth grade classroom. In Prillaman, A.R., Eaker, D.J., and Kendrick, D.M., (eds.), *The Tapestry of Caring*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Ruddick, S. 1989. *Maternal Thinking*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Swadener, E.B. 1992. Comment made during discussion at conference Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education: Theory, Research, and Practice. Chicago, IL.

Tronto, J.C. 1993. *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. New York: Routledge.